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Review of The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics by Kenan Malik

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The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics

Malik, Kenan. *The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics*.

The systematic flaw in Malik's (*Man, Beast and Zombie; Strange Fruit*) latest work is that it is a survey of the history of ethics, with an antirealism focus. The text includes a preface, followed by 20 cryptically titled chapters that tell a story of select cultural, philosophical, and religious theories of ethics worldwide, with a focus on historical movements rather than philosophical arguments. In the last chapter, "The Fall of Man," the author concludes that morality is only a comforting illusion. Malik's antirealism stance emerges early in the preface with his emphasis on Friedrich Nietzsche, who infamously declared "God is dead," challenging divine command theory (although no more than Plato did with the Euthyphro dilemma). Nietzsche saw morality as a plot to persecute the strong, but Thomas Hobbes's social contract theory, presented in his *Leviathan*, heads off this argument; according to Hobbes, even the strongest of us is better off in a social contract than the state of nature.

VERDICT As a survey of the history of ethics, this book fails. For example, Malik devotes fewer than three pages to social contract theory, a bulwark against the radical moral skepticism the author ultimately embraces.—William Simkulet, Andover, KS